No. 239

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

25th July, 1945

DEAR MEMBER,

Among the new Christian groups which have arisen during the war is the Council for the Church and Countryside.[1] It is concerned with one of the most vital economic and social issues of our day—the use of our land, and it is putting forward a point of view which deserves careful study.

THE SOIL AND THE GOOD LIFE

The Council is the result of a fusion of two groups which have been actively at work for some years. The churchmen in it are theologians and Christian sociologists. They have come to the conclusion that many of our present social ills are due to the divorce of urban man from his roots in nature and the soil. They seek to emphasize certain harmonies in nature which belong to God's creative purpose. They believe that there is a "natural order" and that an understanding of "what man is in the order of creatures" is essential to the making of a healthy society. Man is a part of God's natural creation; his only hope of achieving the good life is to know himself for what he is.

The other group represented in the Council has no clearly defined membership: it consists rather of a number of writers who have a common approach to certain questions, but diverge from each other in subject-matter and in opinion on detail. They include certain biologists, landowners, farmers, nutrition experts: some are original thinkers: the more prolific of them are popularizers of ideas of others.

Their approach can be summarized as follows:[2] the study of soil biology has revolutionized our conception of what soil is. It is a living organism and can therefore be killed. Its life is one

[1] Secretary, the Rev. Patrick McLaughlin, St. Anne's House, 57a Dean St., London, W. 1.

[2] It is exceedingly difficult to select from the long list of books the most important. The following is neither an exhaustive nor an authoritative list. The best known work on soil erosion is Jacks and Whyte *The Rape of the Earth*; Lord Northbourne in *Look to the Land*, and Lord Portsmouth in *Famine in England* drew the moral for our own country from the first book. Rolf Gardiner in *England Herself* writes as a farmer practising and propagating a theory of balanced farming with no artificial manures. K. E. Barlow's *Discipline of Peace* is a treatise on the discipline of man by nature. Nicol's *Microbes by the Million* and E. B. Balfour's *The Living Soil* are books about the soil. Ronald Duncan gives an account of an attempt to found an agricultural community in *Journal of a Husbandman*.

with the plants which grow on it and renew its fertility, and it cannot, therefore, be studied apart from them. The survival of the human race depends upon the productivity of the soil which covers the earth's surface like a thin mantle. Soil erosion, the carrying away by wind or water of soil too exhausted to hold together, is a man-made catastrophe, not a natural phenomenon. Wherever European man has emigrated, soil erosion has followed. By repeatedly growing the same crops on the same soil, by wrong ploughing, by deforestation, by reliance on chemical manures which stimulate plant growth but fail to make humus, by a thousand drastic onslaughts on nature's harmonies, man has exhausted and destroyed the soil. All man has obtained is cash at the cost of soil fertility, crops that are less nutritious and more subject to disease because they are fed on chemical stimulants, and the certainty of starvation if this course is pursued. Those who think that this country can count on never-ending supplies of cheap food from abroad are living in a fool's paradise ; these comparatively newly cultivated areas must turn to mixed farming, export less and return more to the soil if they are to preserve their fertility for future generations. The moral for this country is therefore that we should increase our soil fertility by mixed farming, natural manures and a strict rule of return of waste to the soil. We should grudge every good acre swallowed up by the sprawl of towns over the countryside and every skilled man taken from the plough to the factory.

If man wants to survive, he must humbly learn nature's lessons and obey them. Instead of behaving as an outsider towards nature, a conqueror with all the weapons of technology at his command, he must see himself as part of nature, co-operating with her on her terms. His place in the natural order is that of husbandman ; his first duty is to the land, to keep it in good heart, and as he plays this rôle he will not only fulfil the only conditions of survival, but will find the deep satisfaction of knowing and fulfilling his true end.

This summary, incomplete as it is, is enough to show how this school of writers arrives at a conception of a " natural order " on which the alliance with Christian sociologists and theologians in the Council for the Church and Countryside is reached.

There is a world shortage of food. It is obvious that this country must produce more food than it did in the period between the wars. If writers of this school are right in saying that natural manure produces larger and healthier crops than chemical fertilizers and increases the fertility of the soil, this is a practical matter and must be decided between agriculturalists by experiment and observation. Religion has nothing to do with it. When, however, writers on agriculture seek a religious sanction for their views and churchmen add their blessing, the matter needs careful

examination. Writing of the desirability of returning all waste products to the soil, one of the writers says: "The law of the conservation of matter in religious terminology would read: all comes from and returns to God. All religions have rural origins . . . it goes without saying that a spiritual revival, therefore, can only accompany an agricultural revival. It is my point that they are the same thing in essence." Another goes even further: "From their very origin the rural and the Christian virtues have been interlocked, and only separated at the expense of them both."

This is much too simple. It is necessary to distinguish much more precisely what is specifically Christian and what has quite other roots. The Christian Church grew up in the cities of the Roman world, and as the origin of the word "pagan" shows, "countryman" and "unbeliever" were synonyms. It was only by incorporating into itself some of the myths and traditions of rural paganism that Christianity became the religion of country people, and we must ask our prophets whether the religion to which they call us is the forgotten elements of the Christian Gospel, or those ancient foundations of all religions of nature with which the Church in her world mission had to come to terms.

It is not always clear that a distinction is being drawn between a "natural order" created by God, which we only partially comprehend, and "natural religion," which is primitive interpretation in religious terms of natural phenomena.

Is it not possible that Christian minds have been subtly taken in the rear by biology and are more conditioned by its influence than they are aware? For biology is a study of life, of wholeness or salvation, and uses many terms familiar to the Christian apologist. The biological truth about man's life is not the whole truth about it as the Christian sees it. In his animal nature man is part and parcel of nature and must obey the rules as any other animal must who wants to survive. At the same time he belongs to another universe, in respect of which he is not the crown of animal creation but something utterly different. He has to live in this tension. Our soil mystics let go of one side of the tension by allowing it to approximate to the other.

Two results follow from this identification of the discipline of agriculture with a "natural order." The theologians, who write of it with enthusiasm as the means whereby man may find a satisfactory pattern of life, omit to say that in the Bible the story of the Creation is very quickly followed by the statement that life on the land was not life as God made it, but the curse of Adam, from which man must be redeemed and set free. Many of those who in this war have gone to the land with the idea of finding the good life have found the curse too heavy for them.

Modern industry and scientific discoveries can and should mitigate the gruelling hardship of life on the land. The machine has brought benefits to human life which some of us who live in comfort grossly underrate. Only those who have never lived without water, electricity or sanitation can regard with enthusiasm the prospect of walking two miles with two heavy buckets of water, as many a countrywoman has to do, and the growing revolt against this needless drudgery cannot be written off, as Mr. Massingham so airily does, as being due to the fact that " women are more likely than men to catch the winds of prevailing tendencies." If we want men and women to stay on the land we must mitigate the rigours of the curse of Adam, not preach it as a blessing.

The second result of singing the praises of this natural order too highly is a marked tendency to disparage other patterns of human life. Man is not only husbandman, but wanderer and city builder. It is by its cities that human life has been enriched. Industrial cities and suburbs are referred to by members of the Church and Countryside in terms of condemnation. None of the writers we have quoted or discussed has a good word to say for those who without working on the land have made villages their home and given lavishly of their time to village activities: there is no stress on the importance of our democratic institutions, even of local government, still less is there interest in the wider concerns of politics. Lord Portsmouth, for example, attacks the social services as the means by which landowners were impoverished. When one sees the Council on the Church and Countryside lending the pages of its bulletin to an attack on the rural work fostered by the National Council of Social Service (which consists largely in the stimulating of activity in Parish Councils and the encouragement through various of its affiliated organizations of rural music, arts and crafts), one is compelled to ask whether this order of nature is leading the Christian sociologists to neglect, and come very near to condemning, human activities which in other company they would support.

The challenge which this group makes is of first-rate importance. Many who most need to learn its lessons disparage it too readily because of the one-sidedness of some of its exponents. A new understanding of country values and a national effort to ensure the economic conditions in which they can survive are long overdue. But the fact remains that the great majority of our present population will spend the rest of their lives in cities and suburbs, using the country for recreation and refreshment. If life on or near to the land is " wholeness of life," then few are likely to have the chance of this salvation. The gospel claims to give us abundance of life here and now, whatever the circumstances of our physical existence.

T.V.A.

The story of the attack which has been made on some of the evils to which the Council for Church and Countryside is so rightly directing attention is told in the Penguin Book T.V.A. Even in this country, where we have no river so vast as the Tennessee, and no problem so large in scale as those set by advanced erosion, devastating floods and malarial mosquities, the experience of the Tennessee Valley Authority has much to teach us. In the introduction to this fascinating account David Lilienthal, who was one of the directors of the Authority, states clearly the guiding principle of his work: "I believe men may learn to work in harmony with the forces of nature, neither despoiling what God has given nor helpless to put them to use. I believe in the great potentialities for well-being of the machine and technology and science; and though they do hold a real threat of enslavement and frustration for the human spirit, I believe those dangers can be averted. I believe that through the practice of democracy the world of technology holds out the greatest opportunity in all history for the development of the individual, according to his own talents, aspirations and willingness to carry the responsibilities of a free man. We have a choice: to use science either for evil or for good. I believe men can make themselves free."

The river, its tributaries, the land which they drain, the forests, the soil and the mineral resources of the soil, the farms, the townships, the democratic institutions of the people—all these he sees as a whole. The parts had become maladjusted. Misuse of the soil had made the river a destructive force; unbalanced exploitation of copper had ruined much farming land; pettiness in state politics had destroyed true democracy. These parts had to be readjusted so that the whole life of the region could be happier and richer, not only for those who lived in it but, by example and by the development of useful products and facilities, for the whole nation.

To deal with the terrible menace of natural resources turned to waste and destruction, President Roosevelt twelve years ago set up the Tennessee Valley Authority, which he described as "a corporation clothed with the power of government, but possessed with the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise." The book describes how new life was brought to this valley, not by an imposition by central government of the ideas of technical experts, but by a difficult and often slow co-operation between the Authority with its special powers, the experts with their often conflicting judgments, private business men and farmers. Projects which could often have been carried through by compulsion were frequently deliberately delayed until the desire for them was expressed by the people themselves. The technical achievements alone are

staggering. In ten years sixteen new dams have been erected, and the electrical power which they generate is distributed to nearly every home, farm and factory in the area at very cheap rates. One hundred and fifty million trees have been planted, a million acres of land have been terraced to prevent erosion, and many thousands of farmers have learnt from experimental farms how to renew their impoverished soil, using a rotation of crops and natural manures and not despising either power machinery or artificial fertilizers prepared by the Authority from resources in its own area.

This approach, taking the region with all that it contains as the natural unit, is adopted by a book which, in the opinion of many who are qualified to judge, is the most important contribution on the future of the countryside which has appeared during the war, the Report of the Regional Survey undertaken by C. S. Orwin and a group of investigators for the Nuffield Trust, and published under the title *Country Planning*.[1] A small region in the western midlands is examined from every aspect, farming, farm layout, soil, communications, social amenities, community life and religion. The chapter on religion alone makes it imperative that any Christian who has at heart the future of the life of the Churches in the countryside should read it.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The growth of the practice of Joint Consultation between management and workers has been one of the outstanding features of war-time industry. Mr. G. S. Walpole, who was a keen advocate of the method and gave the last years of his life to propagating his ideas, gives a full account of them in his book *Management and Men*. Mr. Howell-Everson is an industrial consultant and was Mr. Walpole's constant adviser. Whether the developments which he describes will survive in the post-war world without a determined effort to preserve them is a question which only the future can answer.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

[1] *Country Planning*. 7s. 6d.

JOINT CONSULTATION

N. A. HOWELL-EVERSON

For years before 1939 certain economists and far-sighted politicians were saying that Britain was on the eve of an industrial revolution. That revolution is now taking place. Traditional rights of ownership and management, and traditional claims of the more vocal sections of labour, are giving place to a sounder, more logical, and more practical relationship between those who manage and those who are managed. This new relationship is, in the words of one of its pioneers, "flexible enough to respond to new technical, economic and social impulses, but solid enough to meet every kind of political and international upheaval with firmness, and to absorb their repercussions without weakening." [1]

HISTORICAL ORIGINS

It is not the purpose of this study to trace in any detail the history of this revolution, but rather to examine some of its effects. In order, however, to provide a proper background for what follows, the reader may be reminded that the first revolutionary stirrings arose quite early in the so-called Industrial Age, when Robert Owen discovered something repugnant in what has come to be known as the "commodity" theory of labour,[2] and proclaimed that ownership and management must accept certain social responsibilities in respect of those they employed.

Inevitably, perhaps, in those days, the gradual and partial acceptance of this doctrine emerged as a typically nineteenth-century philanthropy. The practice of profit-sharing—still a feature of many prosperous businesses to-day, was perhaps its fullest expression. Other manifestations were the soup-kitchens, summer bean-feasts, clothing and boot distribution, sick visiting, etc., of benevolent employers.

The fundamental weakness of this philanthropic approach lay in the fact that it made little or no change in the intellectual relationship between management and men. The philanthropic employer was no less autocratic than his more reactionary fellow. For both, the prescription for handling employees was "You aren't paid to think, but to do as you are told." Neither would have dreamed that the employee had any interest in the business beyond the size

[1] G. S. Walpole, *Management and Men.* Jonathan Cape. 7s. 6d.

[2] "... that human labour is purely a commodity, like coal or steel, to be obtained at the lowest possible price and ruthlessly discarded when done with." (*Partnership of To-morrow*, an article in *Britain To-day*, July, 1945.)

of his pay packet. Both referred to, and thought of, their employees as " Hands."

But the employee of to-day is a brain as well as a hand. With the development of education and the growth of industrial class-consciousness, the philanthropic approach became altogether unacceptable to labour. The operative worker knew that he was something more than a mere commodity of industry, even if he were delivered from the worst rigours of that lot by charity. He knew he was an integral part of industry, at least as essential to its prosperity as either capital or management.

A deep sense of frustration developed, along with an abiding conviction that there must be a " catch " somewhere in every beneficent activity inaugurated by a management. This frustration and suspicion, in the early part of the present century, were so effectively played on by certain elements in political life that it came to be believed, on both sides of the industrial fence, that the interests of management and of labour were naturally and automatically opposed. Federations of Employers' Associations and of Trade Unions were created for the express purpose of establishing the strategy for the fight which both parties regarded as natural and inevitable. Only a few far-seeing employers and still fewer labour leaders recognized that in truth the interests of management and of employees were very largely identical.

It was from this minority that the next advance came—the establishment of the machinery for some form of joint consultation, in which the employees were recognized as having a right to some kind of " voice " in the affairs of the businesses to which they made so substantial a contribution. The history of joint consultation has never yet been properly documented, and it is impossible to state with assurance who were the real pioneers in this field. But the movement spread, on lines dictated largely by conditions of expediency in individual cases, and with very little in common either as to principle, policy, or, for that matter, method.

A substantial move towards some kind of standardization came with the reports of the Whitley Committee, but the effect of that most valuable examination was limited by the refusal of the heavy industries to adopt the principle entailed. In more recent years, however, these same heavy industries have themselves taken the lead by the creation of the war-time Joint Production Committees, which, cautiously imitated in many of the non-munitions industries, have given a new impetus to the movement. It has been recently estimated that there are now between six and seven thousand joint consultative bodies of one kind and another operating at factory level in British industry, representative of between two and three million employees. What was at one time roundly condemned in managerial circles as the rashest of experiments has now attained

such proportions that an attempt may properly be made to define some of its implications and to assess some of its results.

IMPLICATIONS OF JOINT CONSULTATION

To begin with the implications, it must be asserted that the acceptance of the principle of joint consultation involves recognition of the fact that employees possess certain rights over and above those imposed by industrial legislation or conceded by Trade Union agreement. These rights may be briefly defined as the rights (1) to be informed, (2) to suggest, and to have suggestions seriously considered, (3) to criticize. They do not in themselves concern either the conditions under which work is done, or the remuneration received for doing it. The satisfaction they provide is purely intellectual. It is recognition of the fact that the employee, not *despite*, but *because* of the fact that he is an employee, has a mental as well as a physical relationship to his work.

A second implication of the principle is that it demands the highest possible standard of efficiency in management, and there can be no mistake about this. Where joint consultation has been established in any reasonable form, the management in all its grades, from managing director to junior charge-hand, has put itself up to be shot at. Its actions will be criticized bluntly, and unless its justifications are substantial, it will assuredly forfeit the confidence of its employees. There has to be an end of the bad old practice of management defending the indefensible merely because to do otherwise would be to reflect on the ability or integrity of its own members. Supervisors and foremen have to learn how to admit that they have made errors ; and it is the general experience that when they do so the employees, conscious of their own shortcomings, tend to be lenient judges. But once they have been granted the *right* (as distinct from *privilege*) of criticism, they will not readily condone any process of whitewashing the inadequacies of either higher or lower managment.

A third implication operates in the reverse direction. Employees who participate in joint consultation, and by so doing admit that kind of mental relation to their work to which reference has been made, are in turn impelled to accept certain standards of proficiency and of conduct which were not by any means universally accepted before. In the days when an operative was paid as little as he could be got to work for, and when the question of his retention or dismissal at an hour's notice depended on the whim, or liver, of some foreman, he saw no reason to maintain any particular standards of personal conduct at his work, or to do more, or better, work than he could get by with. The genuine acceptance of the principle we are discussing puts an end to this unsatisfactory attitude, at least in theory. Experience over a fairly wide field shows that once the

joint consultative principle has been properly "run in," it does so in practice also.

There is a fourth implication to which some reference should be made. The principle will only work when it is introduced and operated with complete sincerity. Obviously if two parties only want to quarrel they can do so just as easily round a council table as anywhere else. But the matter goes deeper. In order to emerge from a state of chronic mutual distrust, it is essential that one of the two parties should commence by trusting the other; and since the causes of the distrust originated in management practices in the bad old days, it is management which must make the first move. To attempt to impose the machinery of joint consultation merely as a façade, as a sop, or as a subtle move to undermine the influence of organized labour, is to court failure—deservedly.

A management which is not prepared to recognize joint consultation as an entirely new and largely over-riding principle in industrial relations would do better to have nothing to do with it. You cannot put new wine into old bottles, and if the principle cannot create a new heart and a new spirit in management as well as labour, it is worth nothing at all. The case-histories of joint consultative bodies, in many instances over periods of several years, show that this is just what joint consultation can do.

A good many managements are worried by a concern which, in point of fact, is relatively unimportant. In general, labour readily accepts the function of joint consultation as being *advisory* and not *executive*. Operatives fully understand the need for skilled management and supervision, and they neither begrudge the rewards that are paid for it nor covet the responsibilities which it entails. If anything, the trouble is the other way round, to persuade them to accept new responsibilities and shoulder, even jointly, new cares.

PROVED RESULTS

Far more important, in an impartial examination of this whole matter, is the fact that where the new relationship has been established, it has been accepted by the employees concerned with a full sense of responsibility. This has been amply demonstrated, alike in the care with which they select their representation, the studied thought with which they compile their share of the agenda and the moderation with which they argue it, and not least in the real practical value of many of the proposals and constructive criticisms they bring forward. To anyone who, like the writer, has watched the working of a number of these councils and committees over an extended period, it is clear that industry, in the past, has left untapped a tremendous reservoir of intelligence and strength. One has yet to meet an employer who, having once operated joint con-

sultation with sincerity, would willingly revert to the old system of autocratic control.

Another conclusion which emerges from the study of joint consultation in practice can almost be expressed as an axiom in mutual relationships. Whenever you give a man some responsibility for a business as a whole—even if it be no more than a co-opted seat on a sub-committee which only meets twice—he begins to *think* in terms of that business as a whole, and to lose the mischievous inhibitions of class-consciousness and departmentalism. And this goes for participants from the management as well as from the employee groups. Joint consultation is quite definitely a move towards what Mary Follett called "industrial integration." One has noticed how quickly the councillors and committeemen start talking about "our" council, and how rapidly this conception advances to the point when they are talking about "our" business.

It is also apparent that where responsibility is freely given to employees, they exercise it with restraint and in no partisan spirit. Numerous examples could readily be cited of employees deliberately refraining from pressing matters which were of real moment to them in order not to embarrass their managements in possibly difficult circumstances. Even in fundamental issues a spirit of compromise prevails. The doctrine of common interest takes quick root wherever the management has given a sincere lead.

There is also ample evidence that a vast deal of misunderstanding and friction in industrial relationships is eliminated when the viewpoint, the policies and particularly the problems of a management are fully and carefully explained to the employees. This is perhaps only natural. "How can joint consultation become a reality," wrote the late Dr. Walpole, "when one side retains all the facts, and the other side has only rumour and suspicions to go on?" and the question remains unanswerable. The employee must be told where he is going, and by what route: then he will perform prodigies of endurance and skill, and will obtain a solid joy and satisfaction from his achievements.

THE EFFECTS OF JOINT CONSULTATION ON OTHER ASPECTS OF INDUSTRY

Joint consultation is not an end in itself, but a mechanism for achieving a far greater end. It is a motivating force leading to action in many other fields. By conceding to the employee the right to think, and to bring his thoughts to the notice of those who control so much of his life, you inevitably start a process of examination, and new conceptions of mutual responsibilities and relationships almost necessarily emerge. To this extent the introduction of joint consultative practices is an unsettling thing; but it is a healthy unsettlement, because it brings traditional conventions into

line with the real facts of life, and induces change where change is long overdue.

The necessary limitations of space do not permit any detailed examination of all the new fields of thought which have been stimulated in this way. Some, however, are of such importance that it would be improper to ignore them. First in importance, perhaps, is the need for some improvement in the administration of industrial justice and discipline. Experiments on various lines are to-day being tried out, and it is possibly as yet too early to estimate their value. In general, however, a very solid opinion is crystallizing out against the traditional industrial practice of allowing the functions of complainant, prosecuting counsel, judge, jury and policeman to be vested in a single person—and he (usually a foreman, ganger or overlooker) a party to the matter out of which the complaint arises. Stimulated by the free exchange of thought which joint consultation provides, and fortified by the greater mutual trust which it creates, industry is beginning to look for some closer approximation to the judicial administration of the civil courts.

A new interest in education—of juveniles, of new adult-entrants, of supervisors—is developing; and labour is showing a greater willingness to shoulder its share of the burden. Apprenticeship and its many problems is being faced as a joint responsibility, and those who know something of the bad conditions of the past must appreciate the almost stupendous development which is involved in some of the proposals now being considered for providing really comprehensive training for apprentices in small and highly specialized works and factories.

There is a strong tendency at factory level—one does not venture to presume more—to develop a new and more constructive attitude towards demarcation disputes, and a much greater readiness—again at factory level—to reconsider without prejudice complicated and anomalous wage-rates.

But it may be that the outstanding contribution which the principle of joint consultation has made towards the development of the good life is the realization it has brought, both in the council chamber and outside it, of the essential worth of humanity—whether its status be that of director or yard sweeper. Participants in joint consultation grow to appreciate one another more as they know one another better. But what happens is something much more than that—a realization of the essential *importance* of people, not because they are powerful or clever, but because they are *people*.

Subscriptions—12s. 6d. ($3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d.; reduction for quantities.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20 BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.

Published in the U.S.A. by